



LOWESTOFT COASTAL COMMUNITY TEAM

SEAFRONT STRATEGY



Contents

Introduction

- 1. Introducing the Coastal Community Team**
- 2. Overview of Lowestoft**
- 3. Related initiatives**

Seafront Strategy

- 4. Ambition and objectives**
- 5. Research and consultation**
- 6. Strengths and weaknesses**
- 7. Key themes and priorities**
 - a. Seafront economy- attractions and facilities**
 - b. Active seafront**
 - c. Heritage and culture**
 - d. Accessible seafront**
 - e. Connectivity**
 - f. Coastal protection**

Delivery Plan

- 8. Goals/actions, performance measures, resources, costs & funding**
- 9. Communication**

Appendix 1 - Coastal Community Team key information and logistics

Appendix 2 – Key documents and supporting data

Appendix 3 – Consultation summary

Appendix 4 - Delivery Plan

Introduction

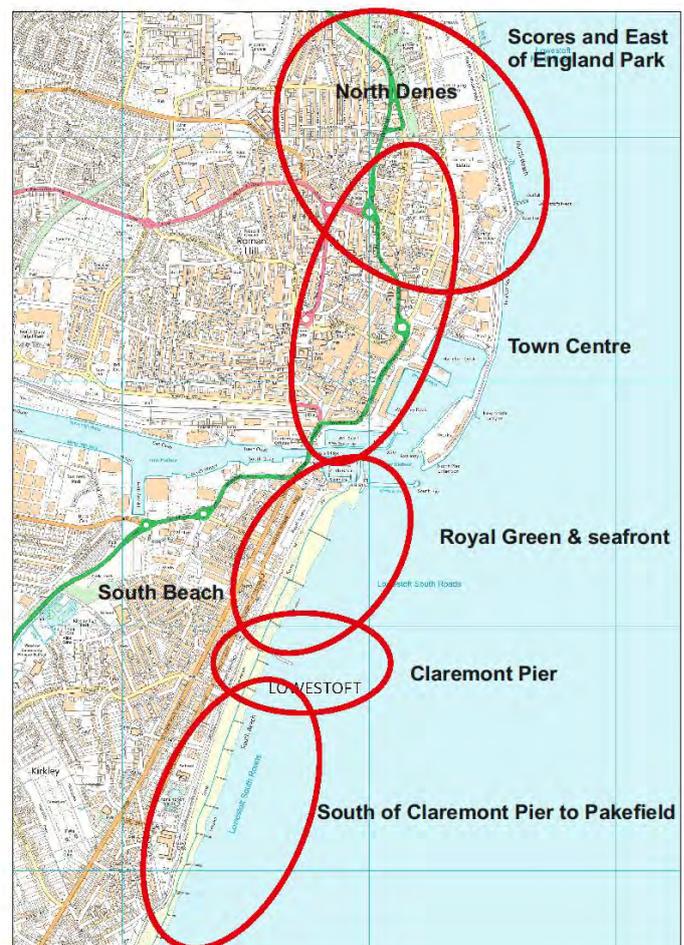
1. Introducing the Coastal Community Team

The Lowestoft Coastal Community Team (CCT) was formed in spring 2015, supported by funding from Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG). The Team is made up of the local authorities and a number of key organisations and businesses from across the town (including Lowestoft Vision/Suffolk Chamber of Commerce, Lowestoft Rising, Community Action Suffolk, Lowestoft Tourism Group and the Kirkley Business Association) that have an interest in improving and promoting Lowestoft. The initial aim of the Team was the production of this economic regeneration plan – the Lowestoft Coastal Community Team Seafront Strategy – which is based on research and consultation undertaken in 2015 and sets out our short and longer term priorities to enable economic growth. *(For a full list of CCT members, partners, and details of the accountable body please see appendix 1.)*

This Strategy focuses on the seafront character areas along the Lowestoft coastline, including the Scores and East of England Park in the north, the town centre, and the south Lowestoft seafront (South Beach).

East of England Park:

East of England Park comprises a large green space and promenade situated in the North Denes. It is the site of the old Beach Village, which was subject to a slum clearance in the 1960s after repeated flooding. The site area also encompasses Ness Point, the most easterly point in the country, the historic net drying racks and a few remaining maritime objects. There is an opportunity to make better use of this space and reconnect it to its maritime past. The area is also adjacent to the Power Park, a strategic employment site allocated to attract and support a cluster of businesses focused upon the energy sector and offshore engineering.



The Scores

The East of England Park is linked to the Historic High Street above by the Scores, a network of steep historic pathways that connected the old town on the cliff to the sea. The Scores are key heritage assets, as are many of the buildings within them, but they are under-used and neglected in parts. They also create a link with the other parks and green spaces in the area – Belle Vue Park, Sparrow’s Nest and Arnold’s Bequest. The area houses many of the town’s museums including the Maritime Museum. Coupled with some of the finest and oldest houses in the High Street this area makes up Lowestoft’s heritage quarter.

South Beach

The South Beach is the main tourist attraction in Lowestoft. It has fine beaches and a Blue Flag award; however coastal erosion and severe weather events meant the loss of the northern end of the beach closest to the town centre, known locally as Children’s Corner. Coastal protection works have been underway for two years and are due to be completed by March 2016. This has meant the placing of a significant



amount of rock armour and the creation of a small beach, where there was once a very wide and sandy beach. Coastal erosion and the works have had an impact on footfall in the area, including the town centre and the Kirkley Village shopping area.

Town Centre

Both seafront areas are linked by the Town Centre in the middle. London Road North (the main shopping area) is a long linear road running from the Historic High Street to the Bascule Bridge, which connects it to Kirkley and the South Beach. Whilst the Strategy does not look to create an action plan for the town centre, as this is already in place and being led by Lowestoft Vision, it does need to consider how increasing visitor numbers and connectivity will have a positive impact on the town centre, reducing the number of vacant shops, increasing money spent in the town and supporting the evening and night time economy.

In brief the aim of the Strategy is to:

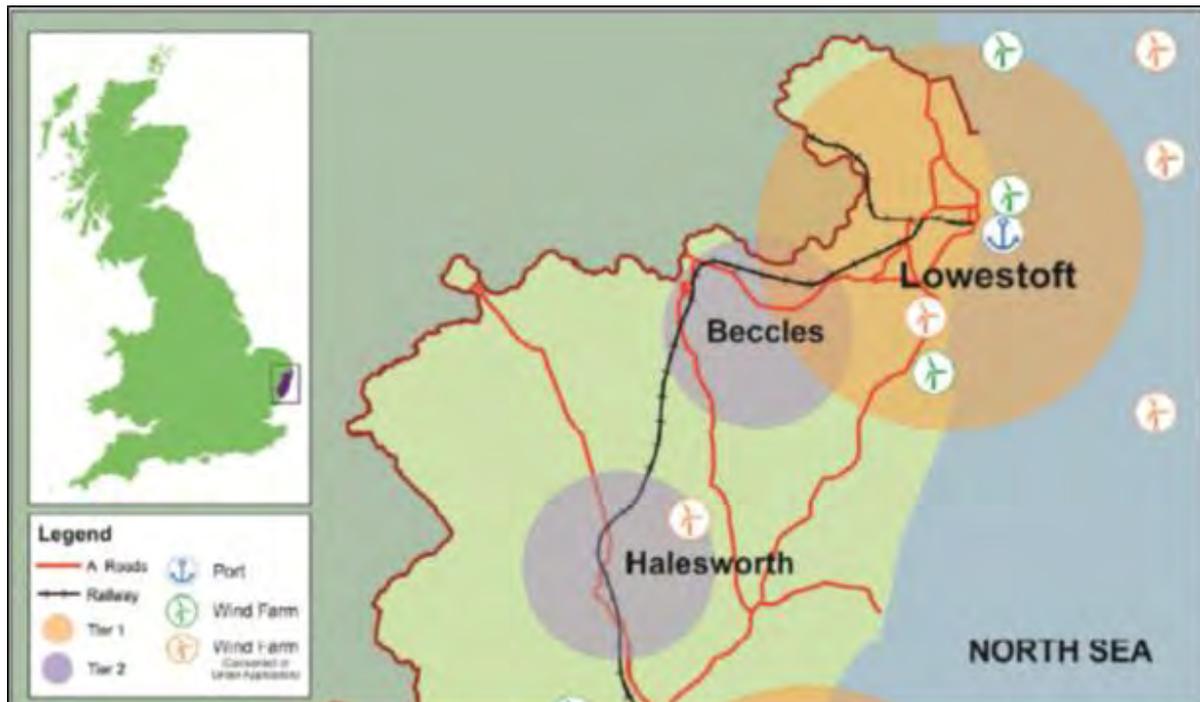
- Develop an informed vision and set of objectives for the seafront character areas based on economic and community needs
- Identify opportunities and threats for economic prosperity
- Identify and prioritise actions and interventions to help achieve the vision

- Set out a delivery plan which will be monitored by the CCT

2. Overview of Lowestoft

History

Lowestoft, situated in the north-east corner of Suffolk, is the most easterly town in the UK. It is the largest town in the East Suffolk district and the second largest in the county, after Ipswich. It has a population of 56,900 (2011) which rises to 69,400 if the growing parishes of Carlton Colville and Oulton are included.



Much of what we see in Lowestoft today has its origins in the 1800s, but there has been a community here for many centuries. In the medieval period beach fishing grew and the physical location of the settlement was positioned to make the most of the sea. Wealthy merchants lived on the cliff tops (as is still evident in the Historic High Street) and the support industry grew to form the Beach Village on the wide open areas, known as the Denes.

In the mid-1800s Sir Samuel Morton Peto purchased the harbour at Lowestoft and built a railway line to the town, opening up opportunities for the fishing industry, which would become the main source of employment and income for the next century. Exports of herring grew and workers arrived from all over the country, including Scots fisher-girls.

Morton Peto's development of Lowestoft, and in particular the seafront in South Lowestoft, (formerly the rural parish of Kirkley), also made the town a fashionable resort for tourists. Benjamin Britten was born in the area in 1913, and is Lowestoft's most famous son.

Lowestoft's location made it an important base in both World Wars. The town was bombarded by German ships in 1916 and during the Second World War it housed five naval establishments.

Today Lowestoft's fishing industry has declined, but the town is still a popular tourist destination. The South Beach has a fine promenade; it still retains a wide sandy beach at the southern end, two piers and traditional seafront gardens. Lake Lothing runs through the centre of Lowestoft and provides a link between the North Sea and the Broads National Park.

The Town Centre and part of the seafront benefited from a major public realm investment scheme in 2006, the Waveney Sunrise Scheme, which was part funded by EU and the Regional Development Agency. This year the second phase of coastal protection work (£3m) in South Lowestoft will be completed. Funding has also been secured for a town centre flood defence scheme (£25m), which will be implemented in 2019/20 protecting the town centre and land around Lake Lothing, which is vulnerable to flooding.



The A12, A47 and the A146 represent the principal highway networks in the town. The A12 is the main link from London, the A47 links to Great Yarmouth and Norwich, and the A146 provides the East/West link to Beccles and Bury St Edmunds. However, the town is divided by Lake Lothing and the need for a third river crossing in the town is highlighted in every community and business engagement event. There is strong feeling locally that the economic growth of Lowestoft is hindered by the fact that it is difficult to get around and through the town. An outline business case evidencing the need for a third crossing (£100m) was submitted to the Department for Transport in December 2015 and is currently under consideration. Further information on the business case can be found here: www.lowestoftcrossing.co.uk

There is a regular train service between London Liverpool Street and Lowestoft via either Ipswich or Norwich. In 2013/14 a £2m scheme to improve the railway station and the area outside it, in order to address congestion problems and improve cycling and bus links was completed. However, improving rail journey times across the region and to the capital remains a priority, as the current journey time to London is around three hours.

Norwich International Airport is a 45-minute drive from Lowestoft, offering direct UK flights to and from Manchester, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Jersey. It also provides scheduled flights to Schiphol Airport, Amsterdam with connections to over 650 worldwide destinations.

The Port of Lowestoft provides a gateway to the town combining both leisure and business operations.

Improvements for the transport and infrastructure are set out in the Lowestoft Transport & Infrastructure Prospectus: <https://www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/assets/Business/Lowestoft-Transport-and-Infrastructure-Prospectus.pdf>

Community

Lowestoft is a divided town, not just geographically by Lake Lothing, but economically, with some of the most deprived communities in the town (and the country) located around the Town Centre and the seafront in the Harbour and Kirkley wards, which along with parts of Pakefield, are the main focus areas of this Strategy.

Harbour (Town Centre, Scores and East of England Park/North Denes area)

Harbour is the most deprived ward in the district. It has a resident population of 8,017 which represents 6.9% of the total Waveney resident population of 115,919 (ONS 2014). Harbour's population is 50.8% female and 49.2% male (Census 2011).

The mean age of the Harbour Ward population is 37 years compared to 44 years for residents in the whole of Waveney. The predominant age band is Age 30 to 44 which represents 20.30% of the total Ward population (Census 2011).

The National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) provides an indication of socio-economic position based on occupation. The largest group is National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification - 6. Semi-routine occupations representing 24.4% of the Ward's population (Census 2011).

Only 13% of Harbour's residents have achieved level 4 qualifications and above compared to 23.9% in Waveney as a whole, and 24.5% of Harbour's residents have no qualifications compared to 12.2% in Waveney (ONS annual population survey 2014). 10.1% of the 16-18 year olds are classed as NEET (not in education, employment or training) compared to 4.2% in Waveney.

Kirkley (South Lowestoft Seafront):

Kirkley Ward is the second most deprived ward in the district. It has a resident population of 7,378 which represents 6.3% of the total Waveney District resident population of 115,919 (ONS 2014). Kirkley's population is 50.4% female and 49.6% male.

The mean age of the Kirkley Ward population is 40 years compared to 44 years for residents in the whole of Waveney. The predominant age band in Kirkley is age 45 to 59 which represents 20.20% of the total Ward population.

The largest group is National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification - 6. Semi-routine occupations representing 21.9% of the Ward's population.

15.4% of Kirkley's residents have achieved level 4 qualifications and above compared to 23.9% in Waveney as a whole and 23.1% of Kirkley's residents have no qualifications compared to 12.2% in Waveney.

Health is a particular issue in Kirkley with the lowest life expectancy scores in the district for both men (74.1) and women (79.6) compared with Waveney 79.3 and 83.5 respectively.

Pakefield

Pakefield has a resident population of 6,596 which represents 5.6% of the total Waveney District resident population of 115,919 (ONS 2014). Pakefield's population is 52.5% female and 47.5% male.

The mean age of the Pakefield Ward population is 48 years compared 44 years for residents in the whole of Waveney. The predominant age band in Pakefield is 45 to 59 which represents 19.40% of the total Ward population.

The largest group is National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification - 6. Semi-routine occupations representing 21.6% of the Ward's population.

13% of Pakefield's residents have achieved level 4 qualifications and above compared to 23.9% in Waveney as a whole and 19.8% of Pakefield's residents have no qualifications compared to 12.2% in Waveney.

The three wards covered by this Strategy all indicate a higher than average number of people with little or no qualifications. In the case of Harbour ward there are a significant number of young people not in education or employment, and crime statistics are

particularly high. In Kirkley unemployment and health are issues, with life expectancy worrying low.

A full table of socio economic indicators for these three wards and a comparison to the district, county and country can be found in appendix 2.

Economy

Whilst the traditional industries such as fishing and manufacturing have declined, the development of oil and gas exploitation in the North Sea in the 1960s led to Lowestoft, along with Great Yarmouth, becoming a base for the industry. More recently the town has begun to develop as a centre for the offshore renewable energy industry. The town is already home to the operations and maintenance base for the 500MW Greater Gabbard scheme. It is also the closest port to the East Anglia Array windfarm, consisting of up to 1,200-1,800 wind turbines just 14km off the coast. This £24bn development has the target capacity of 72GW, which could produce enough electricity to meet the needs of over 4 million households. In the latter part of 2015 Lowestoft was announced as the construction and long term operations base for East Anglia ONE. The port was also announced as the construction base for Galloper Offshore Windfarm (extension to Gabbard). Collectively these will result in significant employment opportunities for the town, with both direct jobs and indirect jobs through the associated supply chain. Lowestoft now needs to ensure that it can provide a skilled workforce able to take advantage of these opportunities.

Tourism is also an important sector, with 7% of jobs in the town attributed to it. Lowestoft is less reliant on the sector than other parts of the district though, with 15% of jobs attributed to tourism across the whole of Waveney. This may be, in part, because many of the big holiday parks sit just outside the Lowestoft boundary. It is an essential sector for the businesses in Kirkley, Harbour and Pakefield, and with competition from other parts of the region it is important that Lowestoft retains and continues to grow its share of the tourism market. In 2014 the Volume and Value report concluded that £78 million was spent in the local area as result of tourism, taking into account multiplier effects, and 1,772 jobs supported, both for local residents and from those living nearby. Other significant sources of employment include wholesale/retail, human health/social work, manufacturing and construction.

Lowestoft, like the rest of the district, is mainly comprised of companies that are micro or SMEs that employ fewer than 20 people.

Overall, like many coastal towns, high long term unemployment is a continuing challenge for Lowestoft with the percentage of the working age population claiming unemployment benefit (Jobseekers allowance) remaining at least 3% higher than the county, regional and national averages. In some sectors an ageing workforce is also an issue.

Lowestoft also struggles to attract professionals to the area, including doctors and teachers. It needs to be a more appealing town with good community and cultural facilities in order to attract people to relocate here.

3. Related initiatives

The CCT does not seek to duplicate work of existing partnerships and initiatives, but aims to complement them. The following list covers the main partnerships, plans and initiatives that relate to the CCT:

Lowestoft Lake Lothing and Outer Harbour Area Action Plan (AAP) - helps to guide development in the area surrounding Lake Lothing and the Outer Harbour in Lowestoft. The plan supports the creation of jobs, particularly in the energy sector, new homes, improved pedestrian, cycle and vehicle links, flood risk management measures and better connections to the waterfront. It aims to address the regeneration of a significant amount of vacant brownfield land, as the result of a declining manufacturing sector.

The CCT will help to support the delivery of the AAP, in particular the East of England Park, the Scores, and Peto Square, which are all strategic sites that also fall into the character areas within this strategy. www.waveney.gov.uk/areaactionplan

Gorleston to Lowestoft (G2L) Coastal Strategy – aims to ensure a sustainable future for the shoreline, taking into consideration the long term protection for urbanised areas, including the relevant sections of this Seafront Strategy. G2L Coastal Strategy also supports the local economy and takes potential growth into consideration.

The protection of the seafront and town is critical to the aims outlined in this plan, and therefore the CCT will work closely with Coastal Management colleagues to ensure priorities and projects are taken into consideration when planning the management and protection of the shoreline.

Lowestoft Rising - comprises a group of five public sector partners working together – Suffolk Police, Suffolk Police and Crime Commissioner's Office, East Suffolk District Council, Suffolk County Council and Health East (Clinical Commissioning Group).

Its' aim is to create a significantly improved quality of life for everybody growing up, living in, working in, visiting and investing in Lowestoft. This will be achieved by creating an environment where public sector organisations work together in innovative ways to deliver better services and bring about long-term change for local people.

The CCT will work with Lowestoft Rising to support projects in the town centre and on the seafront and will support the Pride in Lowestoft initiative, especially when engaging with and involving young people. www.lowestoftrising.co.uk

Lowestoft Vision (Business Improvement District) - Established in August 2013 after a successful Portas Pilot scheme, the Lowestoft BID, which is part of the Suffolk chamber of Commerce, covers a defined area around the town where businesses input into how to improve the town and the trading environment to help grow the local economy.

Their objectives are to make Lowestoft More Secure, More Attractive, More Appealing and More Accessible and as an organisation they will be More Influential on the issues that affect business in the town.

Lowestoft Vision, with support from East Suffolk District Council, has also developed the Discover Lowestoft brand. www.discoverlowestoft.co.uk

The CCT are working with Lowestoft Vision to support increased footfall in the town centre, including creating better connections between the town and the seafront.

The Suffolk Coast Ltd Destination Management Organisation (DMO) - formed in 2012, with the sole purpose of promoting the Suffolk Coast as a visitor destination. Prior to this, tourism promotion used to be predominantly funded by government, but changes in public finances required an alternative approach. The local businesses with support from the local authorities (Suffolk Coastal District Council and East Suffolk District Council) have joined together to create The Suffolk Coast DMO, a membership organisation responsible for tourism marketing.

The CCT will work with the Suffolk Coast DMO to ensure Lowestoft is sufficiently marketed as a tourist destination, especially for families. www.thesuffolkcoast.co.uk

Seafront Strategy

4. Ambition and objectives

The ambition for the Lowestoft Coastal Community Team, based on the aspirations of the stakeholders and consultees, is to make Lowestoft better than ever. Lowestoft will be an attractive and vibrant place to live, work, and visit throughout the year. The local community will take pride in the town. There will be an improved perception of the town from those outside the area, resulting in an increase in the number of new visitors. The town will build on its destination as the most easterly town in the country, and make more of its heritage assets and maritime history. There will be improved access, navigation and tourist information. It will have a flourishing town centre, with increased investment, destination shops, and higher spend in the high street. The seafront will benefit the local community resulting in improved health and wellbeing.

The CCT's objectives are to:

- Promote and grow the visitor economy and improve the visitor experience
- Improve and increase community facilities and activities, especially those that promote healthy lifestyles
- Find sustainable uses of heritage and cultural assets and make more of our maritime history
- Enhance the attractiveness and accessibility of public areas for all.
- Create links (including navigation) to support the growth and performance of the retail sector (including the Historic High Street, the Town Centre, and Kirkley Village)
- Ensure that coastal protection measures are delivered in harmony with the CCT vision and actions.

5. Research and consultation

Over the last few months the CCT has been seeking the views of visitors, businesses, and the local community on the area and exploring priorities for improvements with them. This information, alongside information gathered from earlier consultations for the East of England Park project, and with economic and community assessments have informed the analysis in section 6 and helped shape the key themes and priorities in section 7.

The surveys and consultations included face to face interviews with visitors, online surveys for businesses and young people, and group consultations with the local residents, businesses and community groups. All groups were asked questions about the seafront, and in particular what they liked and what could be improved to support the growth of the town.

A summary of research and stakeholder engagement undertaken to date is in appendix 3.



6. Strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

The following is an analysis of issues specific to the seafront character areas that will have an impact on economic growth.

| Strengths | Weaknesses |
|---|---|
| Attractive coastline with Blue Flag beach, piers and attractions | Poor road and rail infrastructure making Lowestoft hard to get to |
| Unique built heritage and history | Skills shortages |
| Gateway to the Broads National Park via Lake Lothing & Oulton Broad | Low wage economy, which has an impact on spend in the town, e.g. retail spend |
| Strategic plans and investment in place for transport, flooding and development sites | Heritage assets in poor state of repair – especially on seafront and around the Scores. |
| Proximity of town centre to the seafront | Poor visitor information and lack of visitor attractions compared with other towns |
| Parks and gardens, including those on the seafront | Pockets of deprivation – including high unemployment, poor health and high crime rates. |
| New sea defence scheme at South Beach | Poor connectivity to the town centre, and traffic congestion caused by the infrastructure |
| USP – Britain’s most easterly town | High unemployment and number of people economically inactive |
| Proximity of railway station to town centre and seafront | Long linear town centre and seafront that doesn’t encourage people to explore more. |
| Opportunities | Threats |
| Growing offshore renewable energy sector – higher paid employment and more spend in the town | Flood risk (fluvial and pluvial) until flood alleviation scheme in place |
| Increasing visitor numbers and visitor spend across the Suffolk Coast | Further reduction in public sector funding |
| Improvements to the seafront would add to the overall attractiveness of town encouraging people to relocate here | Pressures on local services due to socio-economics e.g. poor health |
| Lowestoft Rising – joined up initiatives through public sector partners, solely focused on Lowestoft | Coastal erosion – causing damage and reducing accessibility to the beaches |
| Assisted Area Status – higher business grants in the area | Out of town shopping developments taking footfall from the town centre. |
| Flood alleviation and potential new crossing will allow development of Peto Square – new retail, leisure and housing development in the town centre, supporting a day and evening economy | Competition from other seaside towns |
| National Coastal Path opening in 2018 | Lack of pride from the local community |
| New tourist marketing campaigns delivered by the private sector | Perception of Lowestoft from outside the area. |
| Two piers with opportunities for further development. | Lack of ambition amongst the younger population |

7. Key themes and priorities

a. Seafront economy - tourist attractions and facilities

Objective: *Promote and grow the visitor economy and improve the visitor experience*

The seafront, in particular the South Beach, is the main tourist attraction for the town with the sea and Blue Flag beach providing a huge draw to the majority of the 1.2m visitors each year. The importance of the seafront is all too apparent to the town's tourism economy which contributes an estimated £56million



each year and sustains 1,772 jobs (Economic Impact of Tourism 2014). However, the potential to broaden and enhance the main draw of the tourism appeal both physically (in terms of new facilities and attractions along the whole of the seafront) and with an extended season, are both key to retaining and developing the importance of the seafront. The town cannot afford to be complacent, especially when in competition with other seaside towns along the East Anglian coast. Our aims are to:

- Encourage day visitors to stay and spend more when they are here by having more activities and places to purchase goods and services
- Encourage higher spending visitors to come and stay longer
- Encourage visitors to come all year round, not purely summer months, thereby increasing the number of visitors

Over the years the South Beach has seen investment, including the very popular Royal Plain Fountains, but still has little to hold people for a significant length of time. The two piers, although housing cafes and amusement arcades at the promenade end, are both in disrepair and no longer have attractions, and in the case of the Claremont Pier are not fully accessible.

The South Pier forms the harbour wall and is owned by Association of British Ports (ABP). After two years of closure, a local Trust has taken on the lease of the Pier and it is once again accessible to walkers and anglers, but is not a major tourist attraction.

The Claremont Pier has a mix of attractions, including a roller-skating rink, amusement arcade, and music venue at the front, but is derelict at the back and visitors are unable to walk along it. It is a popular destination for families and is centrally located, but lacks the appeal of other seaside piers, such as Cromer and Southwold. The owner of the Pier businesses has invested in plans and costings to redevelop the Pier, and delivery model options are being considered. The potential for the Pier could be explored more within the Development Framework (funded by the Coastal Revival Fund).

The Royal Green between the two piers is a valuable open space; it is used for festivals, the circus and the annual funfair. However, for most of the year it is unused and it is opposite the least accessible part of the beach following coastal erosion and storms, therefore more could be made of this area.

An outcome from the Visitors Survey was the need for additional children's activities. The new play park at the southern end of Royal Green, which opened this autumn, has been extremely popular and helps, in part, to meet this need. Phase 2 of this park, aimed at older children, is currently being drawn up. Other ideas such as traditional seaside entertainment – Punch and Judy, donkey rides, etc, all proved very popular, and the local teenagers are keen to see trampolines and inflatables.

The need for new food and retail offers along the seafront has had a varied response, but more up-market restaurants across Lowestoft have proved very popular and have found a new market. A greater variety and one that attracts people in the evening as well as the day time would be welcome.

At the other end of town the East of England Park project, including Ness Point, aims to be a new destination for visitors, linked to the maritime history of the town. The idea of a heritage quarter and new park would add to Lowestoft's offer and encourage people to stay for longer. Linkages between the two sites would need to be considered in the longer term – e.g. boats, road trains.

Actions

- Encourage new concessions on the seafront, in particular children’s entertainment/ activities, and new food and drink offers that add to the current mix and/or promote an evening economy by marketing them collectively and offering flexible land licenses in order to reduce the risk for new businesses.
- Look at opportunities for new development as part of the Development Framework along the seafront, including the Piers, which could increase the number of concessions and attractions.
- Explore and develop other projects, such as the East of England Park and the Scores, which would create an alternative tourist offer to the Lowestoft South Beach, bringing in new visitors and extending the stay of existing visitors.
- Work with the Suffolk Coast DMO and Discover Lowestoft brands to support the marketing of the area bringing in higher value tourism
- Improve the tourist information provision for visitors, making it more accessible.

b. Active Seafront

Objective: *Improve and increase community facilities and activities, especially those that promote healthy lifestyles*



The seafront is already a focal point for a number of activities and events. The South Beach is used for volleyball tournaments and a popular activities programme is run for young people during the holidays including beach golf, football and Zumba. Along the seafront there are tennis courts, a bowling green, family golf, and a

new play park. Horse riding is permitted at Pakefield Beach, and cycling, walking and running are all popular along the promenade.

At North Denes the East of England Park is used informally for cricket matches and ball games, and the seawall is popular with runners and walkers. The nearby Denes Oval is home to the Lowestoft Town Cricket Club, and there are further tennis courts and a nine-hole putting green.

However, there is an opportunity for the provision of sports facilities and activities to be developed further, especially in underutilised areas of the seafront. The lack of water sports was also highlighted in the consultations, especially from younger users of the seafront.

Creating and promoting an active seafront is a priority for the CCT as it adds to the current tourism offer, it will help attract new visitors who have not visited Lowestoft before, and it will benefit the local community by helping improve their health and well being.

In 2015 residents in Lowestoft took part in a challenge to help people be more active and to raise money for local charities. Called Beat the Street the whole community were invited to walk, jog and cycle the equivalent of 25,000 miles in a virtual round the world trip. Along the journey were other 'most easterly points' in other continents – Istanbul, Cape Flisingsky, and Brunswick Head. Beat the Street cards were issued to all school children and were available to residents. To participate they just needed to tap the cards against the special sensors, called Beat Boxes, which were placed on lamp posts around town, which then recorded the participant's mileage.

The scheme was exceptionally popular and an effective way to get the local community being active and supporting Suffolk's ambition to become England's Most Active County.

Following on from the scheme Lowestoft Rising is looking for ways to keep the momentum of walking, running and cycling, especially for school age children. One way is to create a one mile long trail in every school playground, and this could be replicated in our public parks and on the seafront.

The visitor, business and community consultations all rated the creation of trails or interactive trails as one of the top suggestions for improving the seafront. This, along with the fact that walking was sited as the top activity undertaken by visitors, would suggest that there is real potential for Lowestoft to become an area for walking tourism.

Natural England has started work on the England Coast Path, a new long-distance trail that will eventually allow people to walk around the whole English Coast. They are currently looking at the route from Hopton-on-Sea in Norfolk to Aldeburgh in Suffolk, and this will go directly through the main Seafront Strategy area - East of England Park, the town centre and the South Beach (where the existing Suffolk Coast Path starts). Designating the route as part of the England Coast Path will bring some real economic benefits with support for local services like shops, hotels and pubs through increased spending. This part of the route is timetabled to become part of the national route by summer 2018. As the project develops the CCT will continue to look at ideas and linkages with the scheme to see how we can get maximum benefit from the opportunities that it could bring.

In addition 2016/17 is Suffolk's Year of Walking, a countywide celebration that also encourages new walking opportunities. The initiative aims to promote walking, which is free and environmentally friendly with significant social, and physical and mental health benefits. It is ideal for people of all ages and fitness levels who wish to become more active. Amongst other events Lowestoft South Beach will be the starting point for a 'mega walk' and one of the highlights in Suffolk's Walking Festival, which should again bring new visitors into the town.

October 2015 also saw the start of the country's most easterly Park Run. Every week over 100 people turn up to run 5km along the seafront for free. At the other end of town is the annual Scores Race (now in its 21st year), a demanding run from the Historic High Street, along the sea wall, and then traversing up and down the Scores (13 stepped hills).

Another major opportunity for the Seafront will be the Aviva Women's Tour 2016, which will see a major cycling tour start in Southwold, and travel through Lowestoft. The Tour will bring spectators and exposure for the town, providing economic benefits, as well as promoting participation in sport and recreation activities. It links with the Lowestoft Festival, which for the second year will bring track cycling to the town centre with the street velodrome.

Actions

- Encourage participation in active recreation through the provision of new trails.
- Take advantage of events and national initiatives on the seafront (for example the Women's Tour and the England Coast Path) to promote participation in sport and recreation activities.
- Support and encourage new sporting and recreational events in the town and seafront that meet the needs of the local community.
- Explore options for underused areas of the seafront through the Development Frameworks, which could be used to provide new sport and recreational facilities for people to be physically active on the seafront and improve health and well-being.

c. Heritage and Culture

Objective: Find sustainable uses of heritage/cultural assets and make more of our maritime history

Lowestoft has two Conservation Areas – North and South – and 103 nationally listed buildings, the majority of which are located in the character areas in this plan. As outlined in the History of Lowestoft in section 2 North Lowestoft contains the medieval town, which was characterised by the development of long and steep narrow passageways, known as the Scores (meaning to cut or make an incision). The Scores once provided a passageway to the former Beach Village (now the East of England Park area) which was the most easterly community in Britain.



Many of the Scores were named after local people and public houses and are a notable characteristic of the town and have been a source of community interest. Light House Score is 123 feet above sea level and the present lighthouse is situated at the top and Mariner's Score offers picturesque views of the North Sea with its pointed brick arch. The Scores are generally very enclosed, being delineated by flint and brick walls or, in a few locations, traditional Suffolk crinkle-crinkle walls. They are included in the North Lowestoft Conservation Area and there are 4 Grade II listed walls and steps along the Score network, and 35 Grade II listed buildings along the Historic High Street.

Inappropriate development has occurred to the rear of properties on the High Street, whilst unsympathetic design, material and poor maintenance have impacted on the appearance of the Scores. Green verges and shrubs along the Scores are currently poorly maintained and overgrown, contributing to the degradation of the public realm and the historic character of the Scores has been damaged, through widening and incorporation into industrial premises.

There is an opportunity to realise appropriate development within the Scores and link the local character and heritage of the area (Scores, High Street, Arnolds Bequest, Bellevue Park, Sparrows Nest and East of England Park) into a cohesive high quality heritage quarter. This will support the retail sector, encourage tourism, make the area safer, and create employment opportunities for the residents of Harbour ward. This will be examined further as part of the Development Framework and masterplan for the area.

At the other end of the town the south Lowestoft seafront is the main reason for people visiting the town and is included in the South Lowestoft Conservation Area. As mentioned in section 2 the area, which was originally farm land, was purchased by Sir Samuel Morton

Peto and developed as an elegant Victorian pleasure resort. The result was a series of grand seaward-facing terraces of town and lodging houses, and a number of large hotels to cater for the holiday market. The strip immediately fronting the sea was developed into a promenade, with a mixture of fine villas and open spaces set along it.

The South Pier and South Basin had been developed with the construction of the harbour in the early 19th century. The Grade II listed Royal Norfolk & Suffolk Yacht Club is also situated here. The area, adjacent to the Yacht Club, had significant investment in 2006 as part of the Sunrise Scheme.

A number of traditional 1930's seaside assets have been locally listed including:

- Look out shelter (used more recently as a lifeguard station but has been out of use since the 2013 floods.)
- Victoria Chalets
- Jubilee Parade Chalets

These are in a state of disrepair and will need significant investment, but are an important part of the architectural history of the area.

As discussed in the previous section Lowestoft's second pier, the Claremont, was originally built in 1903 as a jetty for paddle steamers taking passengers to and from Great Yarmouth. However, in 1940, the Royal Engineers blasted a hole in the pier to stop the Luftwaffe using it as a possible landing place. By 1948 it was abandoned and suffering from a lack of maintenance. In 1950 a reinforced concrete platform had been built and a pavilion erected, but the end of the pier, however, remains derelict.

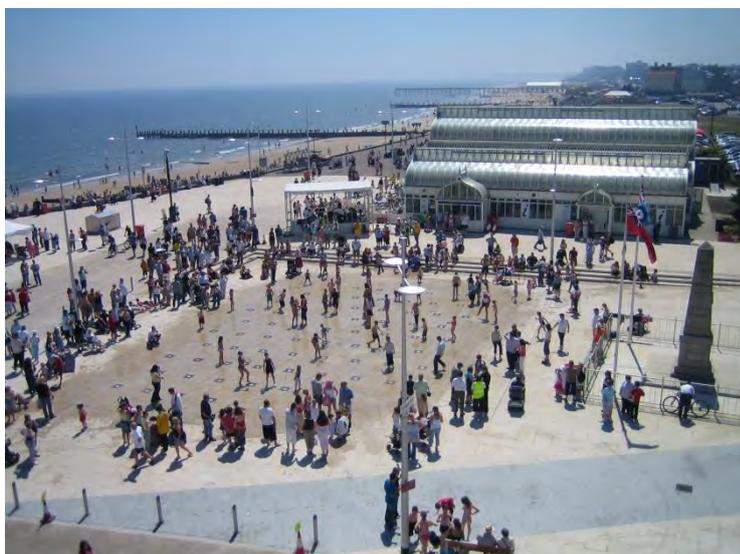
Further along the seafront there are other fine historic features, but some have been subject to vandalism such as the balustrading, or do not get significant footfall like the beautiful Kensington Gardens.

Actions:

- Undertake a development study to explore environmental enhancement, development and connectivity opportunities across the Scores and neighbouring heritage assets including the East of England Park, and the Historic High Street.
- Assess further options for the delivery of the East of England Park project following an unsuccessful Heritage Lottery Fund grant application.
- Look at enhancements on the south Lowestoft seafront area that make the most of historic assets, including the restoration of the 1930s beach chalets and shelter, and the parks, as part of the wider development framework.
- Ensure improved interpretation of historic buildings and local history within tourist information provision

d. Accessible Seafront

Objective: Enhance the attractiveness and accessibility of public areas for all.



The public areas referred to in this Strategy covers the seafront and all its associated parks, gardens and green spaces together with the promenade beaches, squares and main thoroughfares. These areas are freely accessible and play a vital role in the social and economic life of Lowestoft's residents and visitors. They provide great opportunities for informal

activities and relaxation; walking, jogging, exercising dogs, kite flying, picnics, meeting friends and enjoying the views and being outside.

The sometimes unloved appearance and under-use of the public areas were highlighted as an area of concern in the visitor and community consultations. Whilst the Royal Plain fountains (pictured above) at the north end of the South Beach are exceptionally popular, other areas were less so. There was concern about repairs to walls, weeds and litter. The appearance caused by the coastal repairs was also a significant issue and was used as a reason for why almost 50% of Lowestoft's young people surveyed thought they did not have a seafront to be proud of. The business and community groups in particular were keen to see a greater use of spaces for pop-up shops, markets and events.

Connectivity, overall appearance, and use of the public areas, including improvements to parks, will be addressed as part of the Development Frameworks for the South Beach and the Scores area, and as part of the ongoing development of the East of England Park project. They will take into consideration lighting, shelter, street furniture, public art, heritage asset repairs, and accessibility for all users.

The CCT would also like to address disabled access in public areas and to improve facilities. The CCT, in consultation with the Waveney Disability Forum, has commissioned an access audit and action plan for the South Beach area, to feed into the Development Framework. This is being undertaken in February 2016, and the outcomes will be fed into an updated Seafront Strategy Delivery Plan.

Actions:

- Improve the appearance of public spaces (the Scores and the Seafront), look at opportunities for where they could be used more effectively (destination spaces).
- Commission an access audit and see where improved access and facilities can be built into future plans.
- Foster a pride in public areas that reduce the amount of littering and vandalism, using local community groups and champions.

e. Connectivity

Objective: *Create links (including navigation) to support the growth and performance of the retail sector (including the Historic High Street, the Town Centre, and Kirkley Village)*

The town and seafront comprises of three key areas located along a long linear route which covers approximately four miles from Sparrows Nest gardens/East of England Park in the heritage quarter in the North, the main town centre (London Road North) to Kensington Gardens at the southern end of the South Beach. The town is also divided by the Bascule Bridge which links, and some feel severs, the north/town centre from the South Beach.

Over recent years a number of wayfinding projects have been installed, which has lead to a confusing and non-uniform approach to navigation in the town. In 2005 a number of modern public realm improvements (the Sunrise Scheme) were made to the town centre and Royal Plain (at the northern end of the South Beach), whilst maintaining a classical Victorian design in the heritage quarter and at the southern end of the South Beach.

The shape of Lowestoft is long and narrow and unfortunately this tends to lead people to have an impression of greater distance. This coupled with recent closures of part of the seafront for coastal management works is having a negative effect on footfall with fewer visitors travelling into the town centre.

The Visitor Survey and Mystery Visitor survey both highlighted issues over the lack of maps and provision of tourist information. It was noted that the provision of some facilities, such as the toilets, would benefit from better signing. In addition fewer visitors travel to the north end of the town, or to Ness Point.

In order to address these issues, a full signage audit was commissioned by Lowestoft Vision. It found that over a number of years various projects have added street signs, which has ultimately made their use redundant because the signs are confusing and in some cases out of date. It is not necessarily the placement of the existing signs which is the problem, but

their inability to take visitors on a easily understood journey from one location to another i.e. from the Station to the beach, the Town Centre to the ancillary side shopping streets etc.

The report made a number of recommendations as to what improvements should be made to assist with influencing the behaviour of visitors to Lowestoft and how to engage with them. Lowestoft requires a series of information and mapping points strategically placed to give the visitor the opportunity to understand the layout of Lowestoft, appreciate that there are a number of elements and places to be experienced and encourage them to plan to visit more if not all of them. Signage, mapping and information points were recommended in specific locations in the study area, with the two parks as 'bookends' of the scheme and the main focus being the key public squares either side of the bridge - Station Square in the town centre and Royal Plain at the South Beach.

Other longer term considerations that could have a positive impact on connectivity to the main shopping street and the development of this area will be the location of the new third crossing. An outline business case recently submitted to the government indicates the preference for a central crossing, located significantly further west than the current Bascule Bridge. This would result in far less traffic on the current bridge making it a more attractive walk between the South Beach and the town centre. In addition significant investment going into flood defences in the coming years will open up the areas close to the bridge for redevelopment, increasing the retail and leisure provision, which will help the growth of the daytime and evening economy.

Actions:

- Develop and implement a full signage and tourist information project as recommended in the Signage Report to encourage shoppers to explore the side retail streets of Lowestoft and to highlight points of interest and encourage visitors to explore key attractions.
- Explore other short term projects that help to link the town centre and other retail areas, e.g. lighting, walking and heritage trails.
- Development Frameworks to look at key tourist routes and links, in particular for the Historic High Street and Kirkley Village.
- Longer term look at development opportunities created by the traffic and flood defence improvements, in particular around Peto Square.

f. Coastal Protection

Objective: *Ensure that coastal protection measures are delivered in harmony with the CCT vision and projects.*

Coastal protection and flood defence schemes are essential for the people, economy and environment of Lowestoft. The seafront has been subject to substantial coastal erosion in recent years, particularly on the beaches closest to the town centre. 2013 saw the worst flooding in the town for 60 years, and further damage to the seawall defences at Children's Corner, which had already been closed for safety reasons.



East Suffolk District Council and Great Yarmouth Borough Council are working together to develop a strategy for the future management of the coast from Gorleston-on-Sea to Lowestoft.

The aim of the strategy is to ensure a sustainable future of this shoreline taking into consideration:

- The long term protection for more urbanised areas
- Management of unsustainable defences
- Whether there are possibilities to allow the release of sediment that may benefit different frontages along this stretch of coast
- Whether there are opportunities for environmental enhancements
- How the strategy supports the local economy and considers the potential for growth.

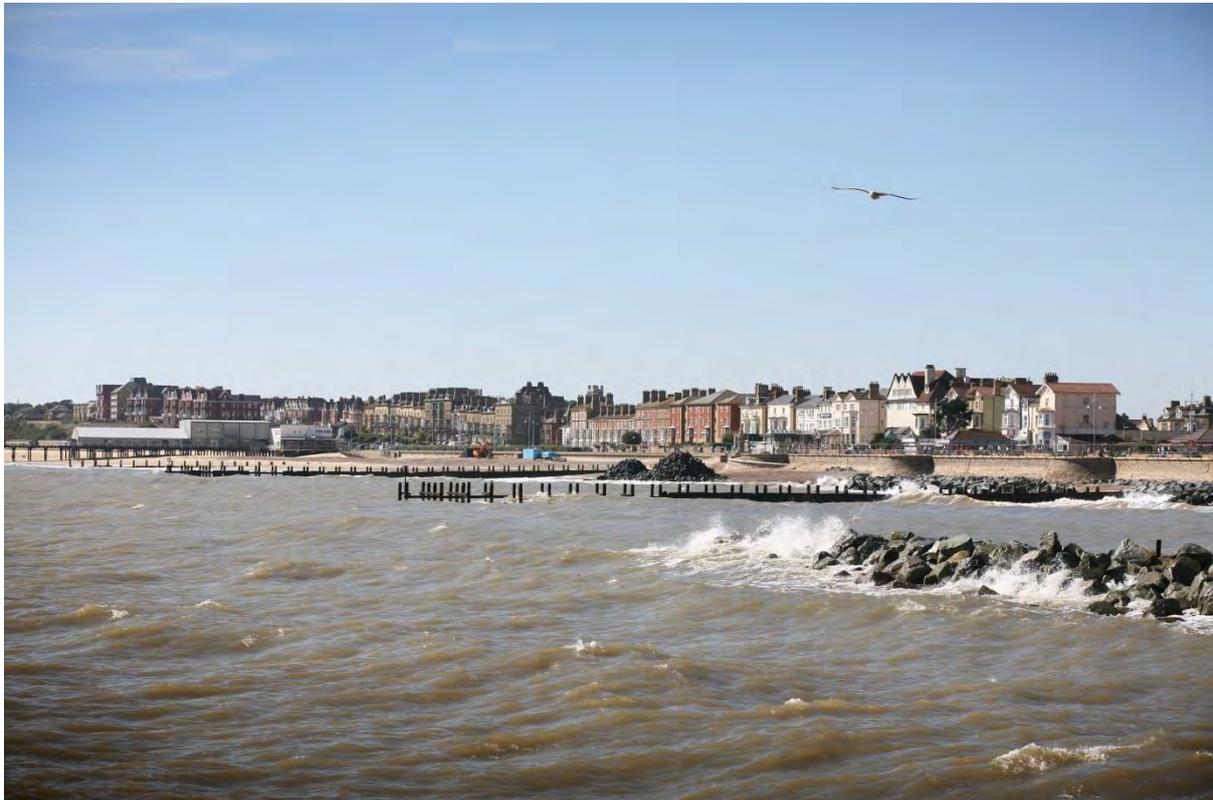
In 2014 work began to repair the seawall and restore a small beach at Children's Corner at the South Beach. The work is due to be completed and the beach reopened in March 2016. The CCT has successfully secured funding from the Coastal Revival Fund to create a new vision and masterplan for this area of the seafront, taking into consideration the changing nature and limited access to this part of the beach, whilst needing to retain footfall to support the businesses, previous investment and links to the town centre.

On the other side of the town in the past, a beach extended along the entire frontage of the East of England Park, but this has now been almost entirely removed by waves and currents. The current seawall is now at risk from potential undermining and wave overtopping (leading potentially to restrictions on public access along the promenade along the top of this wall, and localised flooding in extreme events). The G2L Strategy recommends that they maintain the defence line, and that any approach should be cognisant and sympathetic to

the proposed East of England Park proposals for development of part of the area immediately landward of the defence.

Actions:

- To work with the coastal management team to ensure the Gorleston to Lowestoft Coastal Strategy takes into account the ambition and objectives of the CCT, and to make sure projects work in harmony with any coastal protection works.
- To commission a development framework for the area that creates a new vision and purpose for the north end of the South Beach area following the emergency sea defence works.
- Take into consideration any coastal protection measures planned for Ness Point and the East of England Park when developing project ideas, and look for joint funding solutions.



Delivery Plan

8. Goals/actions, performance measures, resources, costs & funding

The full Delivery Plan is set out in Appendix 4. It outlines the projects the CCT has identified will help achieve the objectives set out in this strategy. The Delivery Plan is a 'living' document and will be monitored and updated at the CCT meetings. Some of the actions/projects have been developed and led by the CCT, for example the two development frameworks, and others are being led by partners.

The value of the CCT is that they have helped shape and coordinate activity that supports the economy growth potential of the seafront and town centre.

9. Communication

The CCT commissioned a number of surveys and has held two consultation events, with over 500 people participating and helping to prioritise ideas for improvements. These are in addition to the consultations already undertaken as part of the East of England Park Project.

The consultations have been followed up with a newsletter and information has been included in the council's magazine In Touch, which goes to all households in Waveney, and East Suffolk Means Business (the council's business website), along with press releases and social media notifications.

The Lowestoft Coastal Community Team Seafront Strategy will be launched on Thursday 10th March 2016, in English Tourism Week, at a joint event combined with the re-opening of the beach, following two years of repairs to the seawall and sea defences.

Further information can be found nearer the time on the website:

<http://www.coastalcommunities.co.uk/coastal-teams/lowestoft/>

The CCT will continue to consult with the community as part of the ongoing plan for the Scores and the South Beach through the Development Framework process, as well as providing regular updates on progress on all the CCT projects via their newsletter.

Appendix 1 - Coastal Community Team Information and Logistics

| Name of CCT | Lowestoft Coastal Community Team | |
|--|--|---|
| Single Point of Contact (SPOC) | East Suffolk District Council Riverside, 4 Canning Road, Lowestoft, Suffolk, NR33 0EQ Tel: 01502 523396 Email: Richard.Best@eastsuffolk.gov.uk | |
| CCT Membership – Steering Group | | |
| Paul Wood (Chair) | Head of Economic Development & Regeneration | Suffolk Coastal & East Suffolk District Council |
| Phil Aves | Change Manager | Councils (SCDC & East Suffolk District Council) |
| Darren Newman | BID Manager | Lowestoft Rising (Suffolk County Council) |
| Wendy Dalton | Chair | Lowestoft Vision (BID) |
| Tony Gittins | Chair | Kirkley Business Association |
| Claire Taylor-Crisp | Community Field Officer | Lowestoft Tourism Group |
| David Scott | Business Owner | Community Action Suffolk |
| David Moss | Business Owner | Claremont Pier |
| Samantha Jones | Project Manager | South Pier |
| Emma Chapman | Project Officer | SCDC & East Suffolk District Council |
| Anne Willis | Economic Development Officer | SCDC & East Suffolk District Council |
| Ben Porter | Funding Officer | SCDC & East Suffolk District Council |
| Richard Alexander | Partnership Manager | SCDC & East Suffolk District Council |
| Sharon Bleese | Coastal Community Engagement Manager | SCDC & East Suffolk District Council |
| Phil Harris | Communications Manager | SCDC & East Suffolk District Council |
| Other partners and/or stakeholders to be involved. | Waveney Norse Sentinel Leisure Trust The Suffolk Coast Destination Management Organisation (DMO) | |
| Accountable Body | East Suffolk District Council– see single point of contact above. | |
| Management of team | The CCT meets monthly and meetings are hosted by one of the members, usually East Suffolk District Council. The meetings are chaired by either East Suffolk District Council or Lowestoft Rising, and secretariat support is given by the council’s Project Officer. | |
| Support structure | The AAP Project Manager to date has coordinated the Team, overseen the Strategy, Coastal Revival Fund bids and other projects to date. From the launch of the Strategy the meetings and day to day management will be picked up by the Economic Development Officer, with the Project Manager still overseeing any specific regeneration projects. Additional support is provided by the funding and communication teams in particular, but the CCT can draw on any resource within the partner organisations. For example the community engagement events were led by Lowestoft Rising and Community Action Suffolk. | |

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Costs | The day to day running costs of the CCT to date have been funded through the initial grant, which helped support the research and consultations, and in kind support from East Suffolk District Council. The running of future projects will need to be costed into any funding applications (see the Delivery Plan). |
| Sustainability | The Lowestoft CCT will continue to develop and monitor the projects as set out in the plan for the next 5 years. Some of the members already work together on other initiatives, but none have this specific focus. |
| Areas of Specific Interest | Lowestoft CCT would benefit from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The opportunity to visit another CCT outside Suffolk to share best practice – particular ones that share a similar demographic • Advise and best practise on tourism development, seafront regeneration, pier & other heritage assets and marketing • Best practise examples of beach accessibility and ways seafronts have positively impacted on health and wellbeing • Examples where working ports & industry successfully sit along side tourist facilities and attractions. • Ways in which seafront development have had a positive impact on retail centres and inward investment. |

Appendix 2 – Key documents and supporting data

2011: Suffolk's Local Economic Assessment

<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/assets/suffolk.gov.uk/Business/Business%20Services/Economic%20development/Final%20Assessment.pdf>

2011: Census Information about Coastal towns in Suffolk

<http://www.ons.gov.uk>

2015: Public Health Profile

www.localhealth.org

2014: Economic Impact of Tourism – Lowestoft 2014

Assessment of the volume and value of tourism to Lowestoft (available on request)

2014: Economic Impact of Tourism – Waveney 2014

Assessment of the volume and value of tourism to Lowestoft (available on request)

2015 Lowestoft Visitors Survey (available on request)

2015 Lowestoft Mystery Customer Survey (available on request)

| INDICATOR | KIRKLEY | HARBOUR | PAKEFIELD | WAVENEY | SUFFOLK | ENGLAND |
|--|--|---|---|--------------------|---|---|
| Total Population (ONS 2014) | 7,378 | 8,017 | 6,596 | 115,919 | 738,512 | 54,316,618 |
| % Aged 0 - 15 | 18.2% | 19.6% | 12.3% | 16% | 16.9% | 17.8% |
| % Aged 16 - 29 | 18.9% | 22.7% | 14% | 15.7% | 16.8% | 19.4% |
| % Aged 30 - 45 | 17.6% | 19.2% | 13% | 15.6% | 17.5% | 19.9% |
| % Aged 46 - 64 | 26.7% | 23.9% | 26.5% | 26.5% | 26.6% | 25.2% |
| % Aged 65+ | 18.4% | 14.4% | 33.9% | 25.9% | 22% | 17.5% |
| Average age (census 2011) | 40 | 37 | 48 | 44 | 42 | 39 |
| Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) score 2015 (where 1 is most deprived, 32,844 least deprived). <i>Each word is made of smaller areas known as lower super output areas (LSOA)</i> | LSOA 007D – 10 * (* in top 10% most deprived in England) 007C – 2,717 007B – 3,629 005A – 7,989 008A – 9,353 | LSOA 007A – 148 * (* in top 10% most deprived in England) 004C – 1,554 * top 10% in England 004B – 5,283 004A – 5,593 | LSOA 008B – 4,665 007E – 10,167 012E – 14,296 008C – 17,775 012F – 18,076 | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| IMD position within district 2010 | 2 | 1 | 6 | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| IMD position (2015) within district | 2 | 1 | 9 | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| Total no. crimes (2014) | 1,039 | 1,594 | 309 | 6,290 | 38,179 | n/a |
| Eco Active Rate (Jul 14/ Jun15) | 73.3% | 72.8% | 81.6% | 78.2% | 79.4% | 77.7% |
| % of the 16-18 pop classed as NEET (Oct 15) | 5.6% | 10.1% | 4.4% | 4.2% | 3.2% | 13.2% <i>UK figure only</i> |
| % of persons aged 16-64 educated to level 4 and above | 15.4% | 13% | 20% | 23.9% | 29.8% | 35.7% |
| % 16-64 of persons aged with no qualifications | 23.1% | 24.5% | 19.8% | 12.2% | 7.3% | 8.6% |
| % of persons aged 16-64 claiming jobseekers (JS) allowance (Nov 15) | 3% | 4.2% | 1.0% | 1.4% | 1% | 1.5% |
| % of persons claiming JS (over 12 months) | 27% | 29.4% | 23.5% | 0.3% | 0.2% | 0.4% |
| Males Life Expectancy | 74.1 | 75.4 | 79.2 | 79.3 | 80.3% | 78.9% |
| Females Life Expectancy | 79.6 | 81.3 | 84.6 | 83.5 | 83.8% | 82.8% |
| % of all households: owned | 55% | 45% | 74% | 69% | 63% | 63.4% |
| % of all households: social rented | 14% | 18% | 11% | 14% | 15.5% | 18.5% |
| % of all households: private rented | 30% | 36% | 14% | 15% | 15.6% | 16.8% |
| Largest socio-economic classification | Semi routine 21.9% | Semi routine 24.4% | Semi routine 21.6% | Semi routine 19.6% | Lower managerial, administrative & professional 21.1% | Lower managerial, administrative & professional 20.9% |

Appendix 3 – Consultation summary

Visitor survey

During the summer of 2015 a research company was commissioned by the CCT to undertake face to face interviews with visitors, with the following objectives:

- To gain visitors views and opinions of the area
- To discover how visitors found out about the area
- To identify any problems that can arise during visits to the area
- To help provide baseline data which can be used to assess the effectiveness of projects and initiatives
- To help understand visitor flows, movement and behaviour around the area

Key findings

The visitor profile reflected a high proportion of family groups, and 51% of the visitors came from within the East of England, mainly Norfolk and Suffolk, with only 7% from the South East and 3% from London.

79% indicated that their reason for visiting was for leisure/holiday purposes, with a further 13% visiting friends or family, 6% on a non-regular shopping trip and 2% for other purposes.

The top three activities undertaken during their visit were walking (71%), shopping (53%) and eating out (53%). Visitor attractions (48%), beach-related activities (42%) and sport, outdoor pursuits / visits to the leisure centre (34%) were also popular amongst the respondents.

Lowestoft has a high number of repeat visitors, with over three quarters of respondents having visited Lowestoft before. Just under half of those who have previously visited are regular visitors having been 6+ times before. Almost all the respondents (92%) said they were likely to visit Lowestoft again in the future, and the overall satisfaction scores were high.

Main points - areas for consideration and improvement include:

- The lowest satisfaction scores in the survey (although none were significantly low) including the availability of toilets, value for money with regard to food & drink, and attractions, the quality and availability of display and map information, and the range of shops.
- Not many visited the tourist information centre, but despite this the service and provision of information was still felt to be important.
- Relatively low numbers of visitors had been to or were going to North Denes and Ness Point
- The top suggestions for how the South Beach seafront could be improved included children's activities and trails or interactive trails, which tallies with the large proportion of family groups and the popularity of walking.
- There is a need to attract new visitors to the town as well as keep our existing repeat visitors.

Mystery visitor

The CCT commissioned an objective audit of the town and seafront using a 'mystery visitor'. An experienced researcher, with no previous knowledge of Lowestoft, visited the seafront and town centre twice using a detailed check list to evaluate the seafront and town's facilities in an objective way. The researcher measured what was observable, using objective questions that can be answered with yes / no responses, and looked specifically at five key areas – general (bins, signage, etc), retail, catering, toilets and information.



Overall the mystery visitor report was very positive. The highest scores were for parking, which would probably be a surprise to many local businesses, furniture and street lighting, and the toilets. The lowest scores were for retail provision, catering, and information provision.

Main points and areas for consideration and improvement:

- There is a mixture of pedestrian signage, and uniformity should be considered.
- There were a small number of bins around the town that require attention, either due to the presence of weeds or poor state of repair. Consideration should be given to replacing or cleaning them. Weeds on the esplanade were also considered an issue.
- It was difficult to locate toilets and that could give the impression that the town is lacking in provision
- With regard to retail & catering a high number of vacant units in Kirkley were noted, and a run down appearance around Windsor Street.
- Information boards were of varying quality with some suffering neglect.
- The Tourist Information Centre had a limited range of information and need to improve the level of service.

Business survey

During September East Suffolk District Council and the CCT undertook an on-line survey targeted at tourism businesses in Lowestoft and across the wider district. This provided the CCT with an opportunity to monitor trends locally as well as gain an understanding of what businesses in the tourism industry are really experiencing at this time. It also gave the CCT an insight into the priorities that the Lowestoft businesses would like to see happen at the seafront.

The headlines below are for the Lowestoft only businesses.

The majority of respondents were accommodation providers (bed & breakfast 33.43%, holiday parks 13.04% and self catering 8.70%), but there were responses from visitor attractions, museums, retail and food & drink.

Key findings:

Following the severe flooding and damage to the seafront in December 2013 part of Lowestoft beach has remained closed and been subject to seawall repairs. Despite this 43% of businesses felt their turn over in the year so far was the same as 2014, and 30% said theirs was higher.

50% of Lowestoft's tourism businesses are micro businesses and do not employ any additional staff, and out of those that do 16.6% only employ between 1-5 people.

Over a third of respondents do not take online bookings, either on their own website or via a third party.

The main factors affecting businesses are the weather (77.27%) and the national economy (68.18%). 31% were also worried about campaigns from other UK destinations

Main points and areas for consideration and improvement:

- 63% felt that Waveney was not promoted as a destination, with 29% saying that some areas were promoted more than others. Only 4% felt that Waveney was well promoted as a destination. (These results were for the Lowestoft only businesses and higher levels of satisfaction were noted from businesses located in the other Waveney towns).
- 72% would like to see the Council invest in tourism projects to support the industry.
- The highest score for additional facilities that they felt would improve the overall offer on the seafront was for a road train or other form of transportation along the promenade, this was followed by trails (or interactive trails,), weather protection and more events (which all had an equal score.)

Young people's survey

The Waveney Youth Council took up the challenge to seek the views of the school age population. Around 300 young people responded to the survey, and the majority were aged 11 – 17. The survey was sent to all the schools in the district, but the majority of responses came from two Lowestoft schools – Ormiston Denes Academy and Pakefield High School.

Key findings:

Overwhelmingly the respondents felt most positive about the Royal Plain Fountains (69.9%), with reasonable scores for the Piers, cafes & restaurants and the gardens and parks, which all scored higher than the beach itself.

In terms of what they thought would make the most difference to the seafront, 'the need to improve the overall appearance' scored slightly higher than 'more things to do and see'. This may in part have been influenced by the current coastal protection works, as when asked if we have a seafront to be proud of 48.3% answered no. Within their explanation a large proportion referenced the closed beach and appearance of the coastal defences and work site. There were several comments about the toilets, which were in contradiction to the comments made on the visitor and mystery visitor surveys, where they scored highly. A typical response being:

"Bit trumpy in the winter, current construction work is ugly and the toilets on the lower promenade are rank".

Main points and areas for consideration and improvement:

- Younger users of the seafront would like more activities such as funfair style rides, inflatables and trampolines, and fireworks.
- Amongst the mid-range scores there was support for boat rides/water taxis, water sports, climbing wall, market stalls and bike hire.
- In terms of events the main support came for music events, followed by outdoor cinemas
- Young people voted for more public toilets (51.1%) slightly ahead of indoor/outdoor play areas (49.2%). There was also support for weather shelters (44.2%) and more tearooms/cafes (40.2%)
- With almost half the respondents saying that they do not think we have a seafront to be proud of, there is a continued need to involve young people in the seafront development as part of the Pride in Lowestoft initiative.

Community Consultations

East of England Park:

During 2014 a number of consultation events took place to collate the priorities of the local and business communities, ward councillors, and young people for the area, and to help shape the preferred option for the East of England Park project in North Denes.

Two community events were held during the summer, and some of the key themes identified were to: make the area a better tourist destination; create an area which reflects Lowestoft history; make the area more accessible; use sustainable materials, incorporate the surrounding parks and the Scores; and ensure partnership working with the community.

The events were well attended and a number of local residents came forward to form a local community group to help influence and shape the direction of the project

Waveney Youth Council also helped to run a school 'Challenge' to engage young people in the project. In total nine schools involving approximately 413 pupils took part in the Challenge.

The consultations resulted in the following vision and objectives for the park:

- To create a vibrant, creative, contemporary park and interactive community space that expresses the exciting heritage and maritime history of the area.
- To create a location where people can celebrate the past, experience the history and protect it for future generations to enjoy.
- For Lowestoft to have a 'jewel in its crown' at Lowestoft Ness, which its community, tourists and visitors can be proud of.
- An innovative landmark sculpture, which recognises this special location at the most easterly point in Britain.
- To deliver a historic, cultural, and diverse open space for people to experience and enjoy.

CCT Community Event September 2015:

Lowestoft Rising led a community consultation event on behalf of the CCT in September 2015 to help shape the vision and priorities for this Strategy. The consultation focused on the seafront character areas, looking at the strengths and opportunities, challenges and barriers, the main ideas they felt would improve the area, and who should be involved in the delivery.

The outcome helped draw up a long list of ideas for improving each area – Scores, High Street and East of England Park, Town Centre, Royal Plain end of the South Beach, Claremont Pier to Pakefield end of the South Beach.

Lowestoft Rising Event November 2015:

A further consultation – a World Café event - was held in November open to anyone in the local community to come and have their say on Lowestoft. The CCT was one of a number of organisations present at the event, and over 60 people commented on and helped to prioritise the ideas identified in the September event.

Main points and areas for consideration and improvement:

- The equal highest priorities were for walking trails or interactive trails, repairs to public realm and heritage assets, and for music events.
- This was closely followed by improvements to the overall appearance of the seafront, support for fairs and markets, and better weather protection.
- The local community were far less interested in some of the tourist facilities and provision (which scored highly in other surveys) – road trains, children’s and traditional seaside activities or alternative or additional food outlets such as tearooms.

Please Note: at the time of writing this document Waveney was not the single East Suffolk Council. All references to Waveney are in relation to Lowestoft based projects.